



The *Flying Scotsman* leaving King's Cross Station in London on its first non-stop run to Edinburgh, 1928.

1 SANDWICHES, SAVOURIES AND STRAWBERRY FIZZ: DINING AT SPEED ON THE *FLYING SCOTSMAN*

ADAM BALIC

The 'Flying Scotsman' is the name of Britain's best-known and well-loved railway locomotive, as well as the entire *Flying Scotsman* train running on the route between London and Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. The 'Flying Scotsman' steam locomotive was the first in the United Kingdom to be clocked at 100 miles (160 km) per hour, earning it an enduring place in the country's railway history. In 2004, more than forty years after it had been withdrawn from service, it was purchased for the nation by the National Railway Museum in York, England, largely with money donated by the public. And in 2016, after a restoration costing £4.2 million, the 'Flying Scotsman' steam locomotive ran from London's King's Cross station to York railway station, watched by thousands of people along the route.

The origin of the *Flying Scotsman* rail service is rooted in the mid-nineteenth century, when several railway companies began operating a number of highly competitive train services, known as *Scotch Expresses*, on both east- and west-coast routes between London and the main cities of Scotland, Glasgow and Edinburgh. On the east coast many small independent railway companies created different

sections of the East Coast Main Line linking London and Edinburgh. But a process of mergers and acquisitions soon led to the formation of three main companies, the North British Railway, North Eastern Railway and Great Northern Railway, along that route. In 1860 those companies collaborated to establish the East Coast Joint Stock company, with a shared fleet of passenger carriages.

From this collaboration came the first *Special Scotch Express*, which began running in 1862 with simultaneous departures at 10 a.m. from King's Cross station in London and Waverley station in Edinburgh. By the 1870s, the colloquial name for the *Special Scotch Express* train had become the *Flying Scotchman* or *Flying Scotsman*.

The Railways Act of 1921 grouped all of Britain's existing railways into the 'Big Four' two years later, with the joint stock company that operated the *Special Scotch Express* train becoming part of the newly formed London and North Eastern Railway. And in 1923 a new steam-powered locomotive, numbered 1472, rolled out of the Doncaster Works railway plant in England. In 1924, highly aware of public relations, the London & North Eastern Railway

officially gave the *Flying Scotsman* name to both the locomotive (now renumbered 4472) and the entire train when the locomotive was displayed at the British Empire Exhibition in England that year. And on 1 May 1928, the *Flying Scotsman* train made the first non-stop journey from London to Edinburgh, the longest non-stop scheduled service in the world at that time.

The 'Flying Scotsman' locomotive itself went on to set a world record in 1934, becoming the first locomotive to be officially clocked at 100 miles per hour. Those record-breaking achievements, as well as the publicity generated by the railway company, ensured that the *Flying Scotsman* became and remains to this day the most famous train in the United Kingdom, a train whose name is also recognized by railway enthusiasts all over the world.

While the *Flying Scotsman* was to become known as the epitome of comfort and luxury in train travel in Great Britain, it took several decades for high-standard rail travel to arrive in the United Kingdom. Like many low-cost airline travellers today, early passengers on the *Special Scotch Express* train in the nineteenth century did not have great expectations of comfort or luxury. The speed of the journey was the prime consideration, because even after much improvement of roads and coach design, travel by horse-drawn carriage between London and Edinburgh took several days. There were no dining facilities on the *Special Scotch Express* and no corridors (hallways) in the railway carriages. Travellers entered their compartments directly from the station platform through a door that opened on to the individual passenger compartments. Initial travel time by train was ten and a half hours,

reduced to eight and a half hours by 1890, including a twenty-minute lunch break at York station. Although this was a large improvement over travel time by horse-drawn coaches, it was not an especially comfortable experience. And for the first thirty years of the service, travellers' food choices were limited to whatever they brought on board the train themselves or purchased at the brief refreshment stop in York. Since toilet facilities were also lacking on trains during that period, those early travellers might also have been more preoccupied with making a quick dash to the toilet than with the dubious merits of the railway station food.

Food was supplied at most main stopping points, either by refreshment trolleys on the station platform or 'refreshment rooms' inside the station itself. Items offered by refreshment trolleys were by necessity those that could be quickly consumed: hot and cold drinks, cakes, fresh fruit and sandwiches. The refreshment rooms offered a more substantial range of food: a typical set-price menu consisted of soup, a fish course, grilled or roasted meat, dessert and cheese. However, consuming this amount of food in such a short amount of time was obviously challenging and not without its dangers. Several decades after the York refreshment stop had ended, people still recalled that:

The lunch was provided in the refreshment room on the platform and in the early days the soup was served so hot that when the cry, 'Take your seats' came, many passengers had to dash back to the train, having obtained nothing save a few spoonfuls of soup and a burnt tongue. Experienced travellers always passed the soup and got on with as much of the other courses as possible.¹

These refreshments were mainly supplied by the railway companies, and while the food at York station was described by a writer at the time as ‘worthy of the highest praise’,² railway station food in general soon gained a bad reputation, with particular scorn reserved for the railway sandwich. Even by the 1860s, several years before the *Special Scotch Express* trains were launched, the ‘railway sandwich’ comedic trope was already firmly established in Britain, and it continued to be an item of derision during the remainder of the nineteenth century. Comments included, in 1884: ‘The existence of the railway sandwich and its spread throughout the country has long been a source of terror to the people and of anxiety to the medical fraternity.’³ And in 1890,

*A Disclaimer. A well-known firm of refreshment contractors write us, giving an emphatic denial to the report which has been freely circulated during that last few days, as to their having accepted a contract for repaving the Strand with their well-known railway sandwiches.*⁴

The nineteenth-century English novelist Anthony Trollope offered his own vivid description of the offending sandwich:

*We are often told in our newspapers that England is disgraced by this and by that: by the unreadiness of our army, by the unfitness of our navy, by the irrationality of our laws, by the immobility of our prejudices, and what not; but the real disgrace of England is the railway sandwich, that whited sepulchre, fair enough outside, but so meagre, poor, and spiritless within, telling us that the poor bone whence it was scraped had been made utterly bare before it was sent into the kitchen for the soup pot.*⁵

So it was not surprising that many passengers opted for purchasing a lunch basket to take on the train instead of buying a sub-standard railway sandwich.

Victorian and early twentieth-century rail travellers of course had the option of packing and bringing on board their own lunch baskets, but many chose to purchase a ready-packed version. Passengers could order wickerwork lunch baskets at the station, and many hotels also supplied their guests with lunch baskets on request. However, the common practice was to order a lunch basket from the guard (conductor) on the train. The empty baskets were later returned by the railway company to their point of origin by trains travelling in the opposite direction. For travellers on the *Flying Scotsman*, the availability of lunch baskets thus eliminated the inconvenience of the rushed refreshment stop at York.

Although the contents of the railway lunch basket were not exactly gourmet, they did provide much-needed nourishment during the long train journey. A late nineteenth-century advertisement from the Midland Railway Company offered both cold and hot luncheon baskets at several stations, packed with meats, cold salad or hot vegetables, bread, butter, cheese, and a half-bottle of burgundy, claret or stout, or bottled water. It went on to say that ‘Passengers who wish to be supplied with luncheon should give notice to the guard of the train they are travelling by, who will, when necessary, telegraph (free of charge) for it to be in readiness at the point required.’⁶

One of the many oddities of British rail travel during the first half of the twentieth century was the presence of first- and



East Coast Joint Stock North first-class restaurant car interior, operated by North Eastern Railway (NER), 1909.

third-class carriages, but not second class. This unusual situation evolved from the Railway Regulation Act of 1844, which aimed to provide a minimum standard for rail passenger travel and to ensure services at a price affordable to poorer people. But the net effect was that the standard of third class was gradually upgraded from the 1870s onwards, until second class was abolished in the first decade of the twentieth century. These changes in train layout and carriage design were accompanied by a reduction in travel time, with the consequence that the level of comfort afforded to, and expected

by, travellers on the *Special Scotch Express* (the early *Flying Scotsman*) train increased throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Taking inspiration from American railroads in that era, British railway companies had gradually been including dining cars on their own trains from the late 1870s onwards. But it was not until 1892 that a dining car was provided for first-class passengers on the *Flying Scotsman*. By the end of the nineteenth century, the first-class dining car on the *Flying Scotsman* had seating for eighteen passengers, and the third-class dining car could accommodate 42.⁷



Lunch being served in the first-class restaurant car of the *Flying Scotsman*, 1928.

And on 1 August 1900, the company running the London to Edinburgh trains discontinued the lunch stop at York, since all the trains now had carriages with corridors and interconnecting walkways that allowed free movement of passengers through the train as well as access to dining cars and on-board toilets. Luxury

and convenience had finally come to the *Flying Scotsman*.

When the *Flying Scotsman* made its record-breaking non-stop run from London to Edinburgh in 1928, it was promoted as a 'hotel on wheels'. A new first-class dining car was introduced that featured carpeting and Louis

Boiled Cod with Egg Sauce

A dish popular for centuries, boiled cod with egg sauce was described as ‘extremely luscious and palatable’ by an eighteenth-century traveller to Scotland, where it is known as ‘Cabbie-claw’ (probably from the Dutch term for cod, *kabeljauw*). This dish was ideal for railway catering in the early twentieth century, since cod was plentiful and cheap, and both the cod and the egg sauce could be prepared in advance, then reheated, allowing the train chefs time to make more delicate dishes, such as grilled lemon sole, to order.

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole fresh cod fillet
2 tsp salt
55 g (4 tbsp) butter
2 tbsp plain flour
480 ml (2 cups) whole milk
4 hard-boiled eggs, finely chopped (divided use)
Salt and black pepper
2 sprigs of parsley, finely chopped, for garnish

Place the cod fillet flat in a large dish and season on each side with salt. Set in a cool place for 1 hour. (Salting improves the flavour and texture of the cod.) While the cod

is resting, make the egg sauce by melting the butter in a saucepan over a medium heat. Add the flour, stirring with a wooden spoon until the mixture bubbles gently. Continue stirring for 2 more minutes, then add 120 ml ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) of milk. Stir until well blended, and add half the remaining milk, stirring until no lumps remain. Pour in the remaining milk and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture comes to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer 10 minutes longer. Remove the saucepan from the heat and add three chopped eggs to the sauce. Taste, add salt and pepper as needed, cover, and keep warm over very low heat while you cook the cod.

Rinse the salt off the cod and place the fish in a saucepan or fish poacher large enough to accommodate the whole fillet. Add just enough lightly salted water to cover the fish. Bring the water to a boil, immediately reduce the heat, and simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Carefully remove the cod to a serving dish, cover with the egg sauce, and garnish with the remaining finely chopped egg and parsley. Serve immediately.

Serves 4 to 6

xvi-style dining chairs. And to celebrate the new non-stop train service, Harry Craddock, the bartender at the Savoy Hotel's American bar in London, even developed a special Flying Scotchman cocktail. Perhaps in response to this publicity, the railroad added a cocktail bar to the train in 1932, as well as a ladies' 'retiring room'.

A meal on the *Flying Scotsman* was no longer a choice between a luncheon basket and the dubious merits of a railway sandwich. In posters designed by famous graphic artists during the 1930s, the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) emphasized the excellent food, drinks and service that passengers could now expect in the train's restaurant carriages. Typical posters promoted the delicious meals that chefs prepared on the train.

To provide this perfection in dining, the *Flying Scotsman* had an ultra-modern, all-electric kitchen car. Not only was this electric kitchen cleaner than earlier, gas-fuelled kitchens but it reduced the risk of train fires. Hundreds of meals were served from one kitchen on the *Flying Scotsman*, with the electric current supplied by two axle-driven dynamos when the train was moving and batteries when the train was at rest. Such was the novelty and fame of the *Flying Scotsman* that its new cocktail bar and electric kitchen interior were frequently depicted in drawings and photographs and described in print publications during the 1920 and '30s. In the modern kitchens on the dining cars, the meals were prepared by a limited number of staff, much to the admiration of journalists who reported on this modern miracle in train catering:



Poster designed by Austin Cooper for the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) to advertise the excellent service passengers could expect from LNER waiters, 1933.

Flying Scotchman

This cocktail was created by bartender Harry Craddock at the Savoy Hotel's American bar in London to celebrate the first non-stop *Flying Scotsman* train service from London to Edinburgh in 1928.

60 ml (2 oz) blended Scotch whisky
60 ml (2 oz) sweet vermouth (such as Cocchi Vermouth di Torino)
1½ tsp simple syrup (sugar syrup)
1 tsp Angostura bitters
Slice of lemon, for garnish

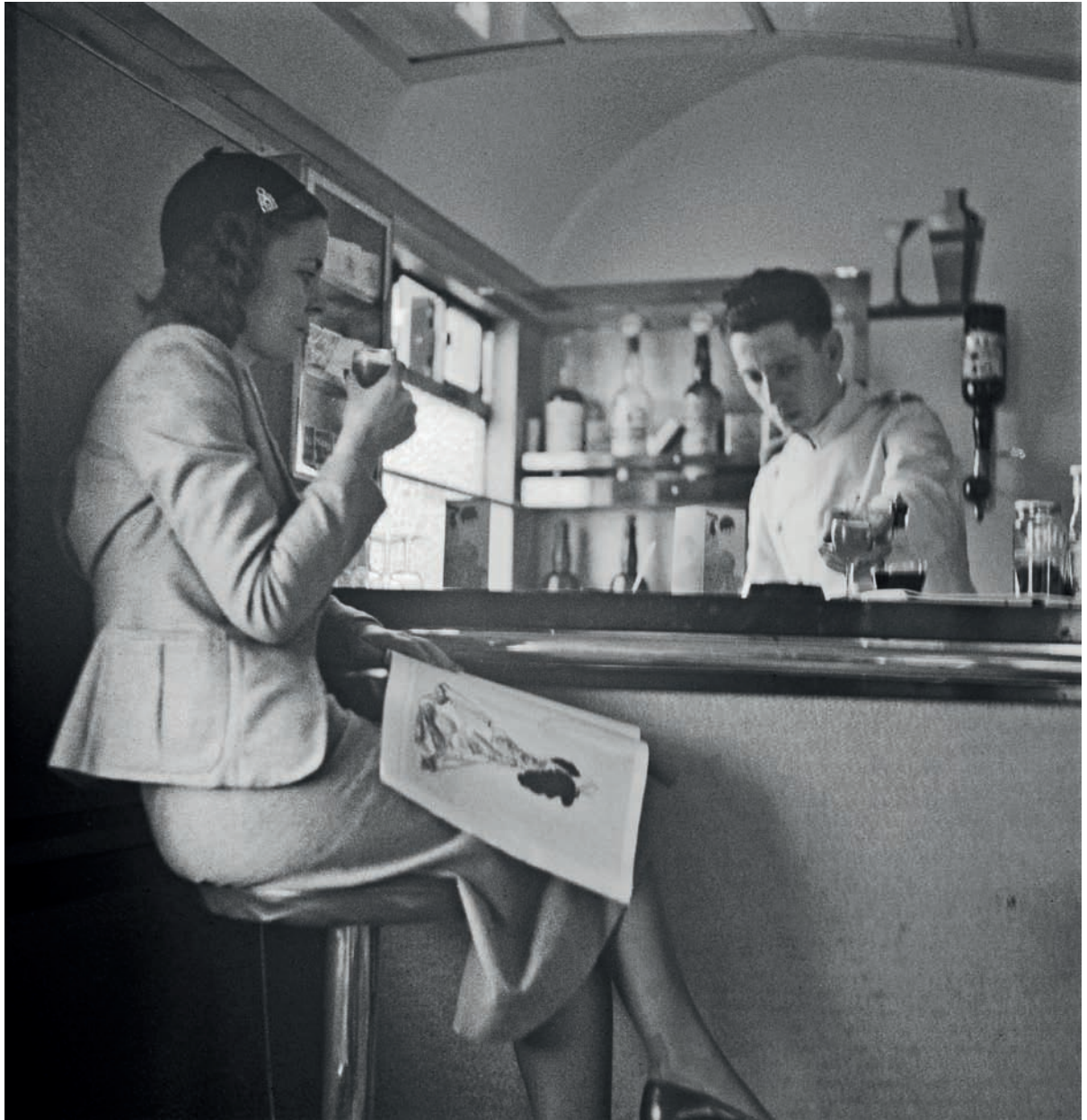
Pour the liquid ingredients over ice in a cocktail shaker, shake well, and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Serve with a twist of lemon.

Makes 1 cocktail

In this tiny, marvellous kitchen one chef and one assistant, with the help of a cheery car conductor and attendants and several just as cheery waiters . . . served this luncheon to eighty passengers in an hour and a half: Potage Albion, Boiled Cod and Parsley Sauce, Roast Leg of Mutton and Jelly or Pressed Beef, York Ham, Chicken and Ham. Mixed Salad. Potatoes, Beans, Peas, Marrow. Sultana Pudding or Stewed Plums and Custard. Cheese. Biscuits. Coffee.⁸

But owing to the space limitations of the kitchens on many trains, meals were also pre-prepared at major railway stations and reheated on board the train, in much the same way as modern airline food is prepared. Producing tonnes of high-quality food every day to supply dozens of trains required the organization of suppliers, kitchen staff, chefs and porters. At King's Cross station in London, this bustling world of railway catering was concealed from the view of railway travellers, with kitchens and storerooms located below ground. In the rare instances when this hidden world of train catering was revealed to the public, their sense of awe at the spectacle was palpable:

[The] kitchens and store rooms are a hidden wonder of the large station, and it was not until he had shown me around them that I realised what a vast quantity of food and drink is consumed on the northern expresses. I descended to these underground kitchens just as the 'Flying Scotsman' was being furnished with food before its departure . . . men were pushing or pulling trolleys loaded high with hampers, crated, baskets of bread and piles of crockery. Chefs were running around giving last-minute directions and hurrying



Sampling a fashionable drink in the *Flying Scotsman's* ultra-modern cocktail bar, 1938.



A chef prepares an enormous batch of Christmas puddings in the kitchens at King's Cross station, December 1932. Dozens of prepared puddings can be seen in the background.



Christmas dinner on the *Flying Scotsman*, 1931.

up operations in order that everything may be safely packed away on the train several minutes before it draws out of the station. Soup is taken on board, ready heated in large stone jars covered with wicker baskets, dozens of gallons at a time on busy days. Sixty pounds of fish is taken on, and there is a greater quantity of meat . . . Passengers consume on an average a hundredweight [50 kg/112 lb] of beef alone. Then there is sixteen pounds of bacon and thirty pounds of chicken. Vegetables add a little weight to the load, a hundredweight and a half of potatoes and dozens of pounds of sundry greens, onion and tomatoes . . . The last, but not the least important, item is the sweets. It is generally reckoned that two

hundred and fifty portions will be required, and a variety is taken on board, and although some may fancy one thing and some another, at the journey's end there is very little left over . . . Hard by the meat store is the cold room. Here is a sight to make a hungry man feel really famished. Beautifully browned ducks and chickens line many a shelf, all ready to go on a train and be heated up to be served.⁹

In addition to the restaurant cars that provided substantial multi-course meals with both à la carte menus and fixed-price menus with more limited selections, buffet cars were also added, which offered light meals, snacks

Honey Sponge Pudding

Steamed puddings, one of the great glories of British cooking, were ideal for railway catering because they could be prepared in advance and reheated to order. Since sugar was rationed during the Second World War, un-rationed honey was a popular substitute in railway kitchens. This modern recipe calls for twice the amount of sugar suggested by the wartime Ministry of Food and uses fresh, not dried, egg.

130 g ($\frac{1}{3}$ cup) aromatic honey (such as Scottish heather honey)
Zest of 1 lemon, finely grated
100 g (7 tbsp) unsalted butter, softened
100 g ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) caster (superfine) sugar
3 eggs
125 g (1 cup) self-raising flour
Double (heavy) cream, to serve

Butter a 1-litre (1-qt) ceramic pudding basin. Spoon 2 tbsp of honey into it and stir in the lemon zest. Whisk the remaining honey together with the butter, sugar, eggs and flour until well blended into a smooth batter. Pour this batter on top of the honey in the pudding basin. Cover tightly with aluminium foil buttered on the underside, and secure with a string tied around the outer rim.

Place the basin in a large saucepan and pour in enough boiling water to come halfway up the side of the basin. Bring the water to a simmer, cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain the simmer. Cook the pudding for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, replacing hot water as necessary to keep it halfway up the basin. Do not let it boil dry!

Carefully take the pudding basin out of the saucepan and remove the foil. Place a rimmed serving dish upside down on top of the pudding basin and invert the pudding onto the dish. Remove the bowl and serve the pudding with cream on the side.

Serves 4 to 6



A beautifully set dining table in an LNER restaurant car, c. 1930.

and other refreshments. A buffet menu from the 1930s lists lobster or prawn salad, egg mayonnaise (egg salad), boiled ham, cold roast beef, ox tongue, galantine of chicken, pressed beef (corned beef), veal and ham pie, pork pies, and sardines or baked beans on toast, in addition to sandwiches. Drinks included cocktails (bottled), wine, beer, tea, coffee and Bovril (a concentrated beef extract that can be diluted with hot water to make a drink).

The *Flying Scotsman's* food service during the 1930s consisted of three catering cars:

one carriage containing the kitchen facilities, flanked by the first- and third-class restaurant cars. Lunch menus in this period offered a four-course option for three shillings and sixpence, or a two-course meal for two shillings and sixpence. The two-course meal had a choice of fish or meat, followed by dessert or cheese with biscuits and butter. The four-course meal included soup, an egg or fish course, and a meat main dish served with vegetables, followed by a choice of dessert or cheese with biscuits (crackers) and butter. Coffee was four



Breakfast and the morning paper in the first-class dining car on the *Flying Scotsman*, 1938.

pence extra. Diners could choose between egg dishes, such as 'Egg Plat Cream' (*oeufs sur le plat*), and fish, such as grilled lemon sole with tartare sauce or boiled cod with egg sauce. Main dishes were roast mutton with redcurrant jelly, braised steak with onion sauce, or cold pickled pork and pickled cabbage, accompanied by baked or mashed potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower and peas. Desserts included steamed date pudding, charlotte russe and fruit salad. In addition to this set luncheon menu, there was a much more extensive à la carte menu, which included soups, sandwiches, a grill selection, a cold buffet selection, savouries (small, piquant dishes) such as Scotch woodcock, sardines on toast or Welsh rarebit, and a selection of ice creams for dessert. The wine lists were equally substantial. A first-class dining car wine list from 1936 offered a wide range of Bordeaux and burgundy red wines and six different champagnes, as well as liqueurs, spirits, beers and one kind of cider.¹⁰ These choices of exceptional foods and wines were all served by impeccably attired and mannered waiters, fulfilling the promise of the railway's advertising posters. This period between the two world wars represented the finest years of train catering in Britain.

However, while the *Flying Scotsman* and other catering services on the London & North East Railway were generous by any standards, they were not profitable. This lack of profitability was not due to overly lavish catering but the result of a number of different factors. Revenues of the railway companies suffered because of the increasing loss of freight and passengers to road transport after the First World War. But during that same period, although train catering did not pay its way,



The chef of the *Flying Scotsman* admires his equipment in the all-electric kitchen car, 1939.

the company did not actually expect it to. It considered the purpose of catering to be just that: to cater to the passengers, not make a profit from them (although they might have been trying to provide top-notch service to attract passengers and hence make a profit from the volume of rail travellers).

A former train-catering field manager described how he was present during the dressing down of another catering manager, who was heavily criticized not for the quality of the food or the service provided, but for committing the unpardonable sin of allowing his train's catering service to make a yearly profit!¹¹ With hindsight, although the quality of the dining experience on these services was

Scotch Woodcock

This nineteenth-century dish belongs to a category of piquant small dishes known as 'savouries', served as the last course of a British formal meal. Savouries were popular with train travellers during the interwar period because they were a more casual course over which diners could easily converse after their focus on the more formal part of the meal.

8 salted anchovy fillets (preserved in olive oil)
115 g (4 oz) unsalted butter, softened, plus 55 g (2 oz) unsalted butter
1 tsp curry powder
480 ml (2 cups) vegetable oil
170 g (6 oz) tiny dried anchovies (available in Asian food shops)
Pinch of ground cayenne pepper
6 slices good-quality white bread, each 1.5 cm (½ in.) thick
4 eggs
2 tbsp double (heavy) cream
Salt and black pepper

Make an anchovy butter by blending the anchovy fillets, 115 g softened butter and curry powder together in a food processor to a uniform, creamy paste.

Make the garnish by heating the oil to 190°C (375°F) in a small saucepan. Carefully add the dried anchovies and fry for a few seconds until crisp. Remove them from the oil and drain on a paper towel, then dust with cayenne pepper.

Trim the crusts off the bread and cut into twenty 4-cm (1½-in.) rounds using a pastry (cookie) cutter. Lightly beat the eggs and stir them together with the 55 g butter and the cream in a small saucepan over low heat, until thickened and scrambled. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove from the heat. Cover and keep warm in the saucepan.

Heat the grill (oven broiler) to 190°C (375°F, or medium heat). Spread the bread rounds with the anchovy butter and place on a tray under the grill. (Freeze any leftover anchovy butter for future use.) Remove them when the bread is browned (about 1 to 2 minutes) and the anchovy butter has melted into the toast. Top each toast generously with scrambled eggs and garnish with the fried anchovies.

Makes 20 small toasts



Passenger ready to board the *Flying Scotsman* at Edinburgh's Waverley Station, 1938.

attractive to passengers, this cycle of increasing loss of revenue – while at the same time maintaining the highest standards of rail travel (including food service) for passengers – could not possibly last. However, while the railway companies and the government made continued attempts to address the falling revenues of the railways, it was the outbreak of the Second World War that finally resulted in large organizational changes in the structure of British railways and put a decisive end to the golden, if unprofitable, age of railway dining in Britain.

When the war began in September 1939, railways in Britain came under government control. Train catering continued for one week after the outbreak of the war – then restaurant cars were gradually withdrawn from service, until the Railway Executive (the government

office in charge of the railways) announced that passengers should not expect any restaurant cars after 5 April 1944.¹² During the war very little was invested in the railways and only essential maintenance work was carried out. As a result, by the end of the war both railway infrastructure and rolling stock had become severely degraded. And it soon became apparent that the rail network could not be maintained by the now effectively bankrupt private railway companies, which had been under government control since the start of the war.

The rationing of food in Britain during and after the war also created problems for railway catering. In 1940 bacon, butter and sugar were rationed, and by 1943 meat, tea, jam, biscuits (cookies), cheese, eggs, lard, milk,

and canned and dried fruit were added to the list of rationed items. However, even during the war the 'service before profit' attitude of railway catering survived in the railway hotel and railway service menus of the London & Northeast Railway. At the Royal Station Hotel in York, the menu for the retirement luncheon for James Rowan, Esq. in 1941 offered multiple options for a five-course meal. The soup course (two choices) was followed by 'Spaghetti Napolitaine', a fish course of cod steak meunière or fillet of whiting Dieppoise, and a main course of either roast sirloin of beef with Yorkshire pudding or stewed tripe *paysanne*, served with potatoes (baked, boiled or mashed), spring cabbage and creamed parsnips. Dessert was a choice of rice pudding, damson tart, honey sponge pudding or orange jelly (gelatin dessert), followed by coffee.¹³ Another London & Northeast Railway menu of 1941, from the Royal Station Hotel in Edinburgh, lists a meal of hors d'oeuvres, thick American soup, duchesse of mushrooms, roast goose, chipped potatoes and French beans, followed by *gâteau amandine* and cheese straws.¹⁴

These rare surviving menus give us a clear idea of the type of foods being served at the London & Northeast Railway hotels and by its railway services, such as the *Flying Scotsman*, during the late interwar and early Second World War period. These multi-course menus, with their combination of classic French dishes and emphasis on fish, roast and pudding (dessert) courses, appear Edwardian in style, even if several decades removed from that pre-First World War era. British railway food remained generous, but, like the railways, it was stagnating.

The temporary government control of the railway companies during the Second World War continued with the nationalization of the railways, which occurred under the Transport Act of 1947. British Railways (later known as British Rail), formed by the nationalization of the 'Big Four' private railway companies in 1948, became the operator of most of the rail transport in Britain. In the immediate period after nationalization, much was left the same as it had been before, but the hotels owned by the railway companies and their food service operations on the trains came under the control of the British Transport Commission Railway Executive, and in 1948 under direct control of the British Transport Commission's Hotels Executive.

The Hotels Executive acquired control of 55 hotels and 400 station refreshment rooms that needed substantial repair and upgrading if a profit was to be realized. Unfortunately, the financial position of the nationalized British Railways was generally poor, operating at a loss by 1955. Plans were drawn up to reduce inefficiencies in order to halt the financial losses. While 'service before profit' had been a feature of the pre-war railways, 'service with profit' was the aim of the new organization. For railway catering that meant reducing or eliminating much of the old-style silver service that characterized the premium dining experience of train passengers before the war. It also meant the closure of railway station refreshment rooms and the removal of restaurant cars from train services. Rather than providing full-service restaurant dining, many trains now offered only light meals and refreshments.

At the same time, British Railways also attempted to improve the image of the

modernized railway catering from the late 1940s to the 1960s. But, judging from the comments about railway catering made in 1960 by Raymond Postgate, founder of the *Good Food Guide*, those efforts were largely unsuccessful:

*Ever since anyone now living can remember railway catering has been a symbol of everything monstrous in gastronomy. The dirty teacups in the station buffets, the slatternly waitresses, the tasteless food, and the triangular slices of curling bread with a thin slice of luncheon sausage between them, called The Railway Sandwich, all have been the most visible and enraging evidences of the ineptness of the decaying railway companies ever since their heyday was past.*¹⁵

The British railway sandwich had again become a national joke. In a broader sense, however, while the sandwich had become a symbol of the overall decline in British railway catering, the general public also understood that the ridicule was not just a complaint about railway catering standards, as would have been the case in the nineteenth century, but instead a lament for the perceived decline of Great Britain in general.

Even as late as 1997, after British Rail became completely privatized, an article in *The Independent* used the British Rail sandwich as a metaphor for the current economic and political state of the United Kingdom, writing that:

As we became more aware of Britain's relative decline, the sandwich stood as a symbol of our second-rateness. The British Rail sandwich, curling at the corners, became a national myth, although no one can quite remember eating one.

*It stood as an indictment of statist, bureaucratic corporations.*¹⁶

Given the poor reputation of the British railway sandwich, it was perhaps understandable that efforts were made to improve its image and, by extension, the reputation of railway catering in general. In 1971 British Rail produced a set of detailed, step-by-step directions for its staff about the correct way to make even the simple railway sandwich. The ingredients varied, but included cheddar cheese or tomato (28 g/1 oz per half sandwich), chicken or turkey (19 g/2/3 oz per sandwich) and boiled egg (half an egg per half sandwich). Exact instructions were also given for the dimensions of the bread slices and the number of slices per loaf.¹⁷ Train travellers were no longer passengers, but 'customers' instead, and while British Rail's desire to improve the standard of railway catering by producing a readily identifiable, uniformly made sandwich is understandable, it was far removed from the company's earlier sentiment of 'regard for our passengers' eupeptic welfare'.

Although its status as a premium service reduced the impacts of the post-war changes in railway catering, the *Flying Scotsman* was not entirely immune to them. An early change was the addition of new combination buffet-lounge car on the service in 1948. This buffet-lounge car had a bar 6.7 m (22 ft) long, with bar stools, whereas earlier buffet cars had sets of small tables each with two chairs. The new long bar design, while allowing more customers to be served at any one time, did not foster the casual intimacy of the earlier buffet car design, which had made those buffets popular with businessmen, who could conduct negotiations

over a relatively modestly priced, but still well-made, meal. Perhaps that is why the newly designed buffet cars were soon transferred to the *Flying Scotsman*'s non-stop relief service (an extra train provided during periods of high demand, such as holiday periods), the *Capitals Limited* train and its successor, *The Elizabethan*, on the London to Edinburgh route.

Under British Railways, *Flying Scotsman* menus in the early 1960s offered a reduced-choice, although still excellent quality, fixed menu in comparison to the more extensive à la carte and table d'hôte menus when the train was privately owned. A *Flying Scotsman* luncheon menu of this period offered tomato juice or Scotch broth, followed by fried fillets of sole with tartare sauce or roast lamb with mint sauce. The final course was a choice between pineapple creole or cheese, salad, biscuits (crackers) and butter. While still offering a premium railway dining experience, these menus did not have the great choice of the earlier era, nor was the emphasis placed on the French origin of the dishes offered. This change in railway dining reflected not only a desire of British Railways to save money, but a broader change in British dining habits. There was a growing recognition and acceptance of the quality of traditional British food and a reduced emphasis on automatically equating the French culinary tradition with high-end dining.

In 1963 British Rail announced that the famous 'Flying Scotsman' steam locomotive No. 4472 would be retired from service and sold for scrap. Fortunately, it was instead purchased by the first of several subsequent private owners, who used it on railway tours along various lines in the United Kingdom, United

States and Australia. Finally, in 2004, the venerable steam engine was bought by the National Railway Museum in York, and in 2006 began undergoing a decade-long restoration.

Meanwhile, during the British Rail era from the mid-1960s to mid-1990s, the *Flying Scotsman* train service between London and Edinburgh continued to exist under that name, although no longer as a non-stop express train. But vestiges of the older elegance in food service still remained. An American woman recalled her experience of travelling from London to Edinburgh in 1969 on the express passenger train still called the *Flying Scotsman* (although it was no longer pulled by the famous locomotive):

I remember riding first class on British Rail across England and Scotland . . . when smartly uniformed stewards served tea in your private train compartment, first spreading a starched white cloth on the little table under the window, then pouring the hot brown brew from a silver-plated teapot into a porcelain cup (with milk added first or last depending on where you stand on that contentious issue). A small plate of sweet biscuits (cookies, in American English) always accompanied the tea. What a civilized way to spend a morning or afternoon, sipping tea, nibbling on biscuits, and watching the British countryside roll by outside the window.¹⁸

After the privatization of Britain's railway system between 1994 and 1997, the *Flying Scotsman* name was maintained in one form or another into the twenty-first century. In 2011, the 'Flying Scotsman' brand was relaunched by the rail operator East Coast as 'part of our policy of bringing back train names and



Restaurant car of the British Railway-era *Flying Scotsman*, 1962.

restoring pride, passion and even a touch of glamour and romance back to the East Coast railway'.¹⁹ Although the *Flying Scotsman* was now a high-speed rail service taking only four hours between destinations, it ran only in one direction, from Edinburgh to London. In 2015 a Stagecoach–Virgin joint venture company, Inter City Railways Limited Virgin Trains (under the name Virgin Trains East Coast), took over the east coast route franchise. The Edinburgh to London *Flying Scotsman* train was retained, and to publicize it a modern electric-powered locomotive was named the 'Flying Scotsman', keeping the name of the train and its association with glamour and style, even

though the locomotive was of a different type and colour from the original.

Finally, in 2016 thousands of people turned out to watch the original, newly restored 'Flying Scotsman' steam locomotive No. 4472 take to the rails for the first time in more than a decade. As part of various *Flying Scotsman* train 'experiences' being held in 2016, it was now also possible to dine in the restored 1950s-era Pullman-style dining cars. In some cases the train remained stationary, but in others the passengers could dine while travelling on the East Lancashire Railway heritage line, in carriages hauled by the famous 'Flying Scotsman' locomotive.



The 'Flying Scotsman' locomotive at the Doncaster Works Open Day, 2003, on the 150th anniversary of the plant works.



Virgin Trains East Coast *Flying Scotsman*, with Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and VTEC MD David Horne, 2015.

A sample menu for one of those dining experiences offered a four-course meal consisting of ‘Strawberry Fizz and Reception’; wild Alaskan king potted crab with lemongrass; creamy roasted sweet potato and tomatillo bisque with coriander-and-cream drizzle; slow-roasted rack of lamb on a bed of garlic-and-rosemary creamed potatoes, with saffron rice, autumn root vegetables and *marchand de vin* sauce; and an ‘Assiette of Sharing Desserts’, followed by tea or coffee with after-dinner mints.²⁰

Although many of the ingredients are modern and international in origin, the

structure of the meal is not very different from the menus of the ‘golden age’ of railway dining during the interwar period. The difference is that now people eat in the *Flying Scotsman*’s dining cars as an experience and end in itself, rather than dining on the *Flying Scotsman* as part of a train journey to somewhere else. Today’s *Flying Scotsman* ‘experience’ is far removed from the original purpose of transporting people between the capital cities of England and Scotland. While this can be seen as a diminishment and trivialization of a once great train service, at least there is no evidence of a railway sandwich in sight.